

Blepharitis

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is an ocular condition characterized by chronic inflammation of the eyelids. There are two types of blepharitis. Anterior blepharitis affects the outside of the lid, where the eyelashes are attached. Posterior blepharitis affects the row of tiny glands that lie behind the eyelashes. It is a common disorder that can easily be treated and managed but not cured.

Signs and Symptoms

- Red, sore eyelids, which may also be swollen
- Gritty, burning or itching feeling in the eyes
- Eyelids sticking together
- Crusting on the eyelashes
- Flaking of skin on the lids
- Cysts at the lid margin
- Blurred vision
- Dry eye

Treatment and Management

Blepharitis is often a persistent condition. Oils and other products normally secreted by the eye and eyelids build up on the lid surface and eyelashes resulting in eye irritation and redness. The single most important treatment principle is a daily routine of eyelid hygiene. This is best achieved by daily cleaning of the eyelid margins to prevent the build-up of secretions and the massaging of the lids to keep the meibomian glands unblocked. Blepharitis tends to recur if you do not keep up with treatment. However, symptoms can usually be eased, and kept to a minimum, by regular eyelid hygiene.

Regular eyelid hygiene

1 Softening of lid margin debris and oils: Apply a warm compress to the closed lids for eight minutes. This will loosen any crusting or flakes of skin. It also clears waxy oils blocking the meibomian glands. This should improve the tear film and make the tears less greasy. The easiest warm compress to use is an EyeBag. An EyeBag is a flax filled mask which is heated in a microwave oven. Alternatively a hot wet flannel can be used. However the flannel does not stay hot for long enough and will need to be reheated. It is also potentially unhygienic.

2 Massage the eyelids (both upper and lower lids) – with your eyes shut, gently roll your first finger on the eyelids (like a rotary action). This helps to push out the oily fluid from the tiny meibomian glands.

3 Removal of lid margin debris: Clean the eyelids with a preservative free eye lotion eg Blephasol or a lid wipe. Apply some Blephasol to a cotton wool pad. Gently wipe this along the upper and lower eyelids and lash area to remove oily debris and crusts from the eyelid and lash area. Repeat for the other eye using a different pad or wipe.

You should do the above routine at least twice a day until symptoms settle. When the symptoms have eased, keep doing this routine once a day, every day, to prevent further flare-ups. If you are prone to blepharitis it is best to think of this as part of your daily routine - just like brushing your teeth. This is the best way to keep symptoms away, or to a minimum.

Your optometrist may advise ocular lubricants (artificial tears) if you also have dry eyes.